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A TOURIST IN TIMOR

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We soon realise that we have arrived in East Timor. At Batugade the bus stops. Everyone must show their I.D. cards. A catholic nun shakes her head in disgust. Then 5 minutes later at Mataain. Last year I witnessed a Balinese policeman beating up a Timorese truck driver who had wanted to pay a bribe of cigarettes instead of money at this post. Another Balinese policeman has taken his place.

Another 5 minutes in the bus and then the third roadblock within the first 10 kilometres of East Timor. Again everyone alights. This time the policeman in charge calls the name on each card and the owner comes forward and is compared with the photo.

I ask a boy what his name is. A Balinese policeman 'jokes' "Anak black - black boy". Both the boy and I ignore the racist cop. My friend takes a photo much to the chagrin of the officer in charge of the roll call. As we pass Liquisa a little later in the afternoon we see a Timorese man staggering along the road, his face covered in blood. The people on the bus are more subdued now. The feel and threat of violence unnerves tourist and Timorese alike.

I meet a French tourist who has been in East Timor for 4 weeks already. He travels where he likes and takes photos of whatever touches him. In East Timor there is much that burns at the hearts of people who are used to freedom.

Pierre tells of his walking in the mountains. "I stayed in a village where there were no military. The people, as is common in the area, eat mice. At this village, however, there was nothing else to eat. They tried to hide the fact that they lived on mice. When I walked into a hut where the mice were kept they looked embarrassed".

At night Pierre watched the exhilarating traditional dance of East Timor. He was urged to join in but could not keep up. Language was a problem but communication was not. Later we are told that the dance is prohibited "an activity of the jungle people". When He arrived at the provincial town he was told that walking on tracks other than public roads was not permitted. He stayed with the local commander. He asked two soldiers how many they had killed "Five" the first soldier said proudly. The second hung his head in shame. "Only one" he said with embarrassment. Late at night he heard gunfire. "The military and police were fighting" he said.